

*Bronze Crowns and a Bronze Head-dress, from
a Roman site at Cavenham Heath, Suffolk*

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THE bronze crowns and the ornament of chains and discs which are the subject of this paper, were found a few years ago at Cavenham Heath, Suffolk, lying close together at a depth of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. from the surface. Later they came into the possession of Mr. Ashley, landlord of the Crown Hotel, Mundford, from whom I purchased them.

Both crowns are high in front with a band which narrows towards the back to encircle the head. The larger crown (pl. xxvii, fig. 1) is made in one piece, but the smaller (pl. xxvii, fig. 2) has the front separate from the head-band, to which it must have been attached by means of solder. The greatest height of the larger crown is $5\frac{1}{5}$ in., the head-band narrowing from 3 in. to $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. at the back. The height of the smaller crown is $4\frac{3}{8}$ in., narrowing towards the back of the head-band in the same manner as the first. The borders of the crowns differ. In the larger a lace-like design is seen at the edge, the holes having been punched out from the front, while along the margin there was originally a narrow metal beading, probably of silver. In the smaller crown a raised line of repoussé work adorns the border. This is so regular that probably a die was used to fashion it. Both crowns are furnished with a metal slip for adjusting them to the heads of various wearers, but there is evidence on the larger one that the slip had remained fixed for a long time in one position, giving a circumference of $23\frac{1}{2}$ in. From this we may gauge the size of the head of the last wearer, whether man or image. The smaller crown being broken, its circumference cannot be satisfactorily ascertained.

In order to test the nature of the metal used, a slip belonging to one of the crowns was forwarded for analysis to the late Professor Gowland, but he found it impossible to make a strict chemical examination without damage. With the aid of the touchstone, and from the streak obtained, he considered it to be 'a bronze containing zinc and lead, an impure alloy, intermediate between brass and bronze'.



FIG. 1

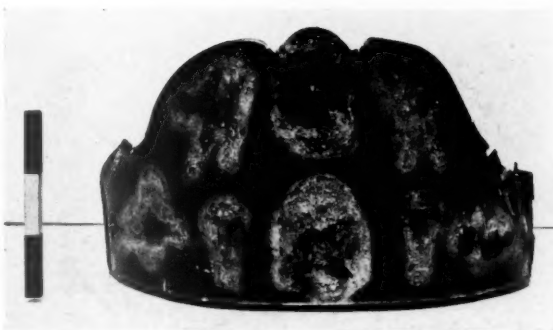
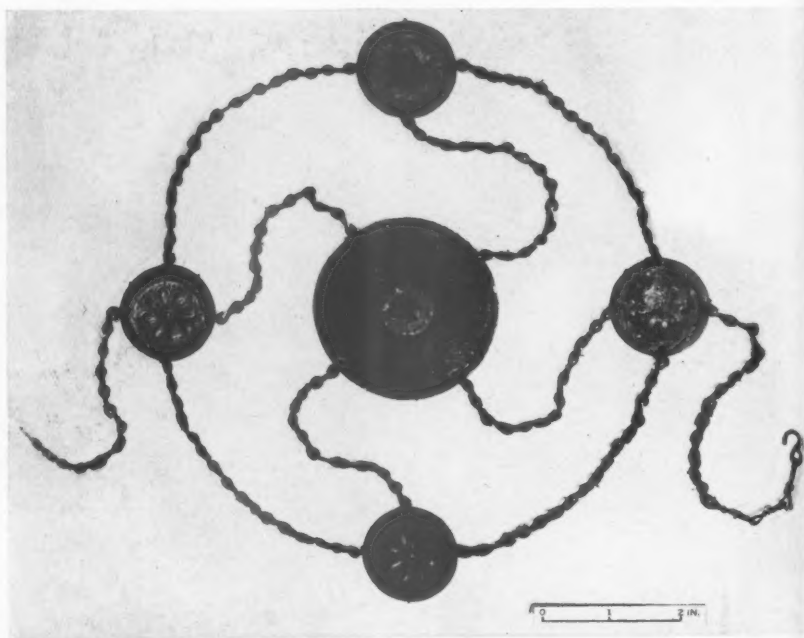


FIG. 2

Two bronze crowns from a Roman site, Cavenham



FIG. 1. Bronze (?) head ornament, from Cavenham



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FIG. 2. Bronze (?) head ornament, from Stony Stratford (for comparison)

The crowns have been profusely ornamented, but the designs of these enrichments can only be guessed at by the shapes into which the solder which held them in place had run. In the front and at the top of the large crown there is a pierced oval, which probably contained a clear set jewel, or a glass ornament. Surrounding this is a frame of repoussé work, somewhat resembling egg-and-tongue pattern. The design is roughly executed, and the details are irregular. On each side of it oval scars have been left by ornaments which have now disappeared. Below this frame and forming the principal adornment of the crown, a niche-like scar with a suggestion of a figure in the centre has been left by the solder, and on either side of it smaller niches can be recognized. The head-band has been adorned with six circular plaques, probably of silver. On either side and below the pierced oval are three projecting metal loops. Other designs are traceable on the smaller crown, two of them having the appearance of winged figures. All are sufficiently clearly outlined to warrant the hope that their significance will be later determined. The fact that not a single ornament was found in position certainly suggests that the articles had been stolen for the sake of the silver.

The bronze chain head-dress which was found beside the crowns is of so unusual a character as to require a detailed description (pl. xxviii, fig. 1). It consists of five bronze discs joined together by eight metal chains, formed of S-shaped links, and is apparently arranged to fit the head, perhaps being worn over a leather cap. The discs were probably disposed in the following manner:—one slightly larger than the rest, for the top of the head, one on the forehead, one at the back of the head, and one behind or above either ear. The largest disc measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. across, the others are in pairs, measuring respectively $2\frac{2}{5}$ in. and $2\frac{3}{10}$ in. The edges of the discs are serrated, and have been filed from the upper side or cut with a chisel. The teeth thus produced are irregular. The discs are ornamented with raised circular lines, and holes have been punched in the centre for the better security of ornaments formerly attached to them. These, like the crown enrichments, are indicated by the forms into which the solder has run. The links of the chains appear to be of drawn wire, but each link has been finished by hand.

An interesting suggestion in regard to the use of the chain ornament came in the shape of a tracing, sent me by Mr. Reginald Smith, of a skull found in a tumulus in Lithuania. It was adorned with a diadem, held in position by chains attached to a disc at the top of the head. It was supposed to be of eleventh-century date. Later he sent me the drawing of a similar Baltic

burial from Esthonia, a sketch of which is shown in Fig. 1. Though not identical, there is sufficient similarity to warrant the supposition that the Cavenham example was also in the nature of a head-dress.

This apparently unique group of bronze objects remained in my possession for several years, but though I had been at considerable pains to discover their origin, it was not till April 1924



FIG. 1. Skull with diadem from Esthonia.



FIG. 2. Serrated disc from bronze ornament, Cavenham.

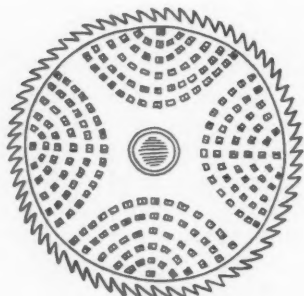


FIG. 3. Gallo-Roman disc (for comparison).

that the question of their approximate date was finally set at rest.

In Mr. Lewis Day's work on Enamelling, 1907, a bronze disc is figured corresponding in size to the largest of those belonging to the Cavenham head-dress, and with the same serrated edge. It was ornamented with blue enamel in the form of inlaid tesserae, and is described by the author as Gallo-Roman. The two are shown for comparison in figs. 2 and 3. When this resemblance was pointed out to me by Mr. Holme, the editor of

the *Studio*, it seemed to afford the most important clue yet found. It also confirmed the view held by the late Professor Montelius of Stockholm, to whom I had forwarded photographs, and who had expressed his opinion that the head-dresses belonged to the earlier period of the Roman emperors.

This decided me to make the too long postponed visit to Cavenham Heath in order to examine the surroundings, and also to excavate on the spot from which the crowns had been taken.

With the help of Mr. Ashley, I was able to locate the exact position of the discovery, as he had taken the precaution to notch the post at the foot of which the articles were buried, and with the kind permission of the Rev. J. S. Holden, lord of the manor, excavations were then begun.

Digging around the post and through the surface soil to a depth of $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft., a dry gravelly sand was reached. It soon became evident that we had lighted upon a Roman site, as fragments of pottery, with bones and teeth of animals, and numerous oyster-shells were turned out. Specimens of the various wares represented were taken for identification to Mr. Wright, of Colchester Museum, who considered that the collection dated from the first to the third or fourth century A.D., and who gave the following particulars of some of the pottery found. There were two roofing tiles, showing the graining of the wood on which they were made, and Castor, Belgic, Samian, buff, slip, and late Celtic ware were also among the objects found on this first visit. It was noticeable that the earliest pieces among them were immediately surrounding the hole in which the crowns had lain. A bronze feather measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. in length was the only metal found on this occasion (fig. 4).

This was as far as the inquiry had gone when I had the honour of exhibiting these relics before the Society of Antiquaries, on 13 March, 1924, and of reading a preliminary paper about them. The conclusions then put forward as to their Roman



FIG. 4. Bronze feather, Cavenham. ($\frac{1}{2}$)

origin were happily confirmed a day or two later by Mr. Bosanquet, who drew my attention to the similarity between the chain and disc ornament and one found on an early Roman site at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire, in 1789. This I have examined at the British Museum, and find that the two are practically identical, except for a difference in the size of the discs which are not serrated, and the addition of two small chains, apparently intended for pendants. The Stony Stratford specimen has three out of five of



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FIG. 5. Silver votive tablet from Barkway, Herts., showing niche with Mars in a feathered frame.

the silver ornaments still in place on the discs (compare pl. xxviii, figs. 1, 2).

The Cavenham crowns, however, are a unique discovery so far as is known at present, and it was of still greater importance to find light also thrown upon them by the Stony Stratford and Barkway hoards. Perhaps the most puzzling feature had been the outlines of the three primitive arches or niches left by the solder on the larger crown (pl. xxvii, fig. 1). These appear to be now explained by the finding at Stony Stratford and also at Barkway, in Hertfordshire, of small silver tablets in the form of shrines, showing niches surrounding a divinity, which, when divested of their frame

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fig. 44

of feathers, in some cases correspond in shape and size to the arches shown on the crown (fig. 5).¹ It is more than probable that some such ceremonial ornaments were applied to the metal crowns, and, as Mr. Bosanquet suggests, the head-dresses may have been worn by pagan priests.

A Roman helmet from Guisborough, Yorks., also in the British Museum, has its front engraved with a row of five similar shrines and divinities.² Reference may also be made to the row of niches



FIG. 6. Silver-gilt plaque from Hedderheim, showing feathers above shrine.

below the peak of the Ribchester helmet, a restored diagram of which was published in *Vetusta Monumenta*, vol. iv, pl. iv, 2.

It had already been conjectured that the three metal loops below the oval space on the larger crown were intended for the insertion of feathers, and a clue to their meaning may be found in some Roman votive tablets from Hedderheim, near Frankfurt-on-Main. On two of these in the British Museum, three feathers surmount the niches, one of which is shown in fig. 6.³ The plaques, which are of silver-gilt, are considered to be of second-

¹ Brit. Mus. *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1922, p. 35.

² Ibid., fig. 100, p. 80, where it is said that the style is very like that of the silver votive tablets from Barkway and Stony Stratford.

³ Brit. Mus. *Guide to the Exhibition illustrating Greek and Roman Life*, 1920, fig. 44, p. 53.

century date. The design of these feathers is conventional, particularly as regards the bold crimping of the plume. This treatment is perhaps more noticeable in three examples of silver feathers, from a great Roman hoard found at Bala Hissar (Pessinus) in Galatia (fig. 7).¹

The striking example already mentioned of such a feather in bronze which I found at Cavenham Heath, not far from the crowns, is shown in fig. 4. It is boldly crimped and, though of ruder



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FIG. 7. Three silver plaques from Bala Hissar.

workmanship, is certainly reminiscent of these other votive plumes. Though not divided at the tip, as are several of the others, it has its parallel in one of the Heddernheim tablets, showing Jupiter in a silver shrine with a similar feather at its apex. Like one of the plumes from Bala Hissar, the Cavenham example also has a rounded base.

In order to test more thoroughly the Roman origin of the head-dresses, I carried out further excavations on the Suffolk site. Trenches were dug, and over twenty trial holes examined. It was hoped that a villa might be discovered, but though traces

¹ Brit. Mus. *Guide to the Exhibition illustrating Greek and Roman Life*, 1920, fig. 45, p. 54.

of Roman remains were found to continue for a distance of some 30 yds. or more from the first excavation on either side, no sign of any building was seen.

Among numerous fragments of pottery, bones, etc., again turned out, were portions of a very large urn with out-curved rim. It was of pale brown paste, and was lying a few feet only from the crowns. The mouth, measured from the outside of the rim, must have had a diameter of $13\frac{1}{2}$ in. Mr. Wright dates it from 40 to 80 A.D. Samian ware with pea-pod border, showing portions of a panel with fighting gladiators, was also identified by him as the work of Paternus, 140 to 190 A.D. Further specimens of slip ware of the third century were interesting, as showing the distinct thumb impression of the potters. The only pieces of iron found were a few nails and a small trident. Portions of three mortaria with black grains of an unusual kind, and not of flint as is generally the case, were among the pottery recovered from this area. Everything was Roman, except some further pieces of the so-called 'brown-leather' Celtic ware. This dated back from 1 to 50 A.D. That there was some Roman dwelling within no great distance of this spot seems likely, considering its proximity to a former Roman station. The position in which the crowns were found is on a slight elevation overlooking the marshes on the right bank of the River Lark. It lies approximately midway between the Icknield Way, and the so-called Black Ditches. Opposite, and across the valley, at the village of Icklingham, considerable Roman remains have come to light, including a dwelling-house, a cemetery with stone coffins, and a hoard of Roman silver coins.¹ Traces of outlying villas have also been noticed.

The crowns and head-dresses are now the property of the Ipswich Museum, to which I have presented them.

¹ Full descriptions were given of these by Mr. Henry Prigg in *The Icklingham Papers*, edited by Mr. V. B. Redstone, F.S.A., in 1901.